

EXHIBIT I

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SUMMIT IN EGYPT: THE SYMBOLISM;The Meeting's Message: Put Terrorists on Notice

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Sometimes, symbolism itself is substance.

Today 14 Arab leaders stood in the searing Egyptian sun with the embattled Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, in an extraordinary show of solidarity against terrorism and of support for a negotiated peace that would finally put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

This is a big photo opportunity," a senior American official admitted of this hastily organized meeting in a Red Sea resort given back to Egypt by Israel in 1982. "But the photo is an important part of the message -- that the future belongs to the peacemakers, and not to those who want to destroy the peace."

But for a half-day meeting grandly titled the Summit of the Peacemakers by the Americans who were behind it, there was one gaping and embarrassing hole in the photo: the missing representatives of Syria and its client state, Lebanon.

And that was not the only obstacle to carrying out today's lauded aims of sharing intelligence to fight terrorism and cutting off money to radical groups like Hamas and Islamic Holy War. Difficulties range from the awkwardness of supplying hard-won intelligence even to Israel, which has spied against the United States, to the private nature of much of Hamas's funds and the charitable activities that win Hamas much of its support.

The Syrian no-show was glaring today, despite all efforts to minimize it. It is Syria, after all, that Washington call the key to a comprehensive Middle East peace. It is Syria that Secretary of State Warren Christopher has visited 17 times. It is Syria that is engaged in peace talks with Israel.

So if this was a summit meeting of the peacemakers, where does Syria fit in? And if this was a summit meeting of those opposed to terrorism, where does Syria really stand?

American officials from President Clinton on down said they were disappointed that Syria refused to come. Damascus chose instead to repeat its call to Israel to return all occupied lands and thus remove the impetus for terror, while saying it continues to support peace.

But American officials were also reluctant to condemn Damascus and President Hafez al-Assad. They suggested instead that Mr. Assad does not want to be browbeaten into one camp or another, wants to keep his options open and did not want to be seen on the stage of President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Syria's longtime rival for leadership in the Arab world.

The officials pushed hard to add some substance to the symbolic victory of the meeting. In the next few days, American officials insisted, there would be concrete steps taken with Israel and the Palestinian Authority to share intelligence aimed at disrupting terrorist cells.

But it is not clear how intelligence-sharing might work between the United States and Israel, which in the past employed Americans like Jonathan Pollard to spy against the United States. A senior American official said it was difficult enough just to identify what kinds of intelligence might be useful to Israel and the Palestinians.

The summit meeting also vowed to work to cut off money for Hamas and Islamic Holy War, forming a "working group open to all summit participants" to recommend how best to carry out these goals. The group's first meeting is to be in two weeks in the United States.

While the officials were pleased to have Saudi Arabia attend at the foreign ministry level and to have the participation of the rich Persian Gulf states, it is these very countries that provide most of the private money for Hamas. The Saudi and Kuwaiti royal families are reported to give significant amounts to charities tied to Hamas, which was given initial support by the Israelis as an alternative to the Palestine Liberation Organization. And much money also flows from Palestinians in Europe and the United States.

So how governments will move to cut this money, and how successful they will be, remains open to question, officials concede. But today was not a day for carping details, officials said.

"It's almost enough to have this range of people here," a Russian official said. "Push too hard or be too specific about terrorist supporters, and the cracks start to appear." It was telling, for instance, that only Mr. Peres and Prime Minister John Major of Britain mentioned Iran as a sponsor of terrorism in their statements.

American officials said the real success of the meeting was to make Mr. Peres and the Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat feel less lonely -- Mr. Peres in his search for peace, Mr. Arafat in his decision to crack down harder on Hamas.

"The Arabs are always willing to stand up and take credit at the high points," a senior American official said. "Now they're putting their prestige on line when the threat is terrorism, and the terrorism is against Israel."

And Mr. Arafat said of the suicide bombers: "Their criminal success will be temporary. They will never kill peace. I feel the serious injury inflicted on us. But I feel through this meeting that I and my partner Shimon Peres are not alone."

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